



FROM POVERTY TO PROSPERITY: THE CAMPAIGN TO CUT POVERTY IN HALF IN TEN YEARS

November 7th, 2008

Chairman Jim McDermott  
Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support  
House Committee on Ways and Means  
1035 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman McDermott:

The Half in Ten Campaign is writing in support of H.R. 6941, the Measuring American Poverty Act, an important step toward improving the measure of poverty in this country, and to thank you for your introduction of this legislation.

The Half in Ten Campaign is committed to cutting poverty in half in the United States over the next 10 years, focusing on practical policy solutions to promote decent work, provide opportunity for all, ensure economic security, and help people build wealth. The cost of child poverty in the United States reaches approximately \$500 billion a year, and addressing the issue of poverty is necessary both for increasing the opportunities available to vast numbers of Americans and improving the U. S. economy.

The current measure of poverty was developed in the 1960s, and does not accurately gauge modern poverty and its ramifications. Food is still cited as a family's greatest expense, certain benefits are not included, and no consideration is given to regional disparities in the cost of living. An updated measure will better assess the actual costs families are facing, include tax credits and government aid, adjust for expenses such as child care and medical care, and better reflect regional price differences. In addition, with an improved standard, policy proposals can be better tailored to meet the needs of those they are intended to help.

Among the Half in Ten campaign's proposals to decrease poverty are expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit, and increased access to child care. Because none of these are included in the current poverty measure, the effect of changes to these policies cannot be weighed. With a modernized standard, we will be better equipped to judge the effect such policies are having. If we are to seriously engage in efforts to reduce domestic poverty, there must be a reliable way to measure the impact of this work.

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We also strongly support collaboration with the National Academy of Sciences in developing a Decent Living Standard threshold, and appreciate the inclusion of such a study in this bill. Even with a modernized poverty measure, there are millions of Americans with incomes above the poverty line but far below what is needed for a comfortable standard of living. It is also important that the new standard created by this measure will not change eligibility for means-tested programs, and will leave the historical poverty measure in place for statistical purposes as well. Any use of the new measures for eligibility purposes should be considered over time and with care.

We thank you for your leadership on this important issue, and we look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Half in Ten

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now

Center for American Progress Action Fund

Coalition on Human Needs

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

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